Dar Raj (Kashmiri: در راج), also known as Dhar Raj, was an influential zamindari estate that existed from 1699 to 1803 C.E. The Dar family held estates in Kashmir and later acquired zamindari properties in parts of Bengal. The Dar Raj family exercised considerable political, administrative, and social influence across these regions during the late Mughal and Durrani periods.

Origins of the Dar Dynasty

The original founder of the Dar dynasty was Hari Krishna Mohan Dar (b. 1687 d. 1768), a Kashmiri Pandit businessman and scholar who migrated from Srinagar (Jammu) and settled in the Dar area of the Akhnoor region. There, he laid the foundations of the Dar lineage. Hari Krishna Mohan Dar had eight children, among whom was Ram Hari Mohan Dar (b. 1718 d. 1789), the father of Virendra Vasudev Mohan Dar (b. 14 Sept. 1758 d. 3 Feb 1821).

Although the lineage began with Hari Krishna Mohan Dar, it was during the reign of his grandson Maharaja Virendra Vasudev Mohan Dar that the zamindari of Dar Raj reached its height. For this reason, Virendra Mohan Dar is regarded as the patriarch and effective founder of the Dar Raj family, and the formal and ceremonial continuity of the Dar Raj dynasty is generally considered to have begun during his reign.

Maharaja Virendra Vasudev Mohan Dar

Maharaja Virendra Vasudev Mohan Dar, (Persian: ویرندرا واسودِو موهان دار), also known as Raja Virendra Mohan Dar, was born in 1758 C.E. in the Akhnoor region of Kashmir. He belonged to the Kashmiri Pandit community and emerged as one of the prominent local zamindars of his time.

During the reign of Ahmad Shah Durrani, Virendra Mohan Dar was formally conferred the title of Maharaja. Contemporary historical works and official records (Tārīkh-i-Darān-i-Akhnoor pp. 861 and Akhanurēra mahārājā bīrēndra mōhana dāra jībanacarita ēsa ēna caṭṭōpādhyāẏa, 1929) of the Durrani period identify him as one of the most influential zamindar in Akhnoor, noting his political authority, administrative capability, and social standing. He played a significant role in the regional history of Kashmir and its adjoining territories. Maharaja Virendra Mohan Dar died in 1821 C.E. of stomach cancer.

During his reign, the zamindari of Dar Raj covered substantial part of the Dar region of Akhnoor. In addition, the family possessed thousands of acres of land across present-day Bangladesh, including Dhamrai, Nannar, Rowail, Sharifbagh, Demra, Ashulia, Jalsin, Char Talibari, and Rajrajeshwar, many of which now lie within the borders of Bangladesh and West Bengal.

Adoption and Lineage Continuity

After the death of his uncle Madhusudan Dar, Ram Hari Mohan Dar, his father, adopted Madhusudan's son Vaqif Ali Khan Dar, who was born Vallabh Mohan Dar in 1752 C.E. Although biologically the son of Madhusudan Dar, Vaqif Ali Khan Dar's position within the principal lineage of the Dar dynasty was established through the practice of adoption, a recognized method of dynastic continuity at the time.

Khan Bahadur Vaqif Ali Khan Dar later converted to Islam and adopted his new name following political and personal developments during the Durrani period. Due to regional administrative policies and patronage, he was formally granted the title of Khan Bahadur by the regional governor. He played a notable role in the political and social history of Kashmir and died in 1810 C.E. in Dhaka, leaving behind four children.

Establishment of the Dar Rajbari in Bengal

In 1801 C.E., severe erosion caused by the Padma River led to the abandonment of the Char Dar Rajbari, located at Char Talibari in Rajrajeshwar. Following this natural disaster, Maharaja Virendra Mohan Dar established a new Dar Rajbari in Nannar village of the Dhamrai region, in present-day Dhamrai Upazila of Dhaka District, Bangladesh. This new establishment became the principal residence and administrative center of the Dar Raj dynasty.

Dhar Zamindar Bari (Nannar Rajbari)

The Dhar Zamindar Bari, also known locally as Dhar Bari or Nannar Rajbari, is an ancient and historically significant zamindari structure located in the Dhamrai region of Dhaka District. The construction of this building was completed in 1801 C.E. by the Dar family, who were among the most influential zamindars of the region.

During the zamindari era, the estate functioned not only as a residential palace but also as a center for administrative activities, land management, assemblies, and judicial decision-making. Within the compound was a large water reservoir known locally as Maharaja Virendra Sagar, named in honor of Maharaja Virendra Mohan Dar.

Architectural Features

The architectural style of the Dhar Zamindar Bari reflects traditional Bengali zamindari architecture, combined with visible British colonial influences. The structure was built using thick brick walls and lime-surki mortar, characteristic of construction techniques of the period.

The complex originally featured spacious courtyards, tall pillars, arched doorways, and long verandas, designed to suit the warm and humid climate of Bengal by allowing ample light and ventilation. Interior spaces included modest ornamental work, cornices, and floral motifs, while maintaining the functional layout typical of zamindari estates.

Educational Transformation

In 1919, under the initiative of Mohini Mohan Dhar, a distinguished member of the Dar family, a substantial portion of the zamindar house was repurposed for educational use. In the same year, the building became the first school premises of Alokeshi (Elokeshi) High School. As a result, many residential rooms were converted into classrooms, while parts of the estate were adapted for administrative use. Despite these changes, much of the original zamindari structure remained intact.

Later Generations of the Dar Family

Raja Mukund Mohan Dar, the son of Maharaja Virendra Mohan Dar, had several children, among whom Rai Bahadur Hara Mohan Dhar was particularly notable. Hara Mohan Dhar was a barrister of the Middle Temple, and his children with his wife Elokeshi included Mohini Mohan Dhar, Jyotindra Dhar, Sarala Dhar, and Kadambini Dhar. Elokeshi was the fifth daughter of wealthy Zamindar Raja Gurnindra Chunder Chowdharee of Bhagalpur.

Mohini Mohan Dhar served as Diwan and Judge of the Mayurbhanj State. Among his four children, the most

prominent were Dhirendra Mohan Dhar, a barrister of the Gray's Inn, and Satyendra Mohan Dhar (b. 1897), who became an officer of the Indian Civil Service (I.C.S.) and was awarded the title C.I.E. Dhirendra Mohan Dhar married Amiyabala, granddaughter of Peary Charan Sarkar and a descendant of the Hatkhola Raj and Manikganj Raj. Their children were Chittajit Mohan Dhar and Pritilata Dhar. Satyendra married Abha Dhar (d. 1 Feb 1967) granddaughter of Sir. Krishna Govinda Gupta K.C.S.I.